



Rivals for CATAN

Part 8 – The “Era of Progress” Theme Set and the Duel

September 27, 2010

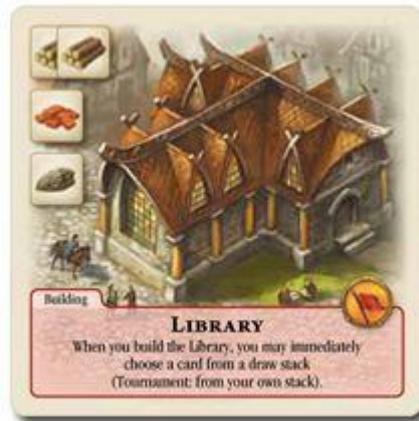
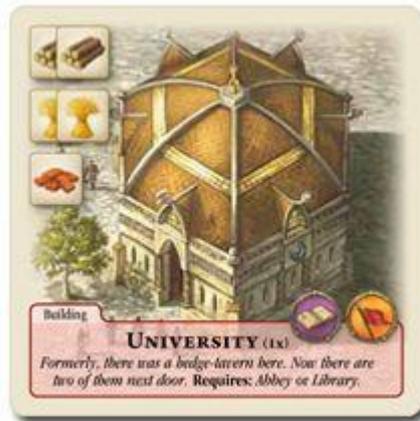
Introduction

The “Era of Progress” Theme Game is played with the Theme Set of that name and the basic cards I introduced in part 5 of my series of blog posts about the reform of the Card Game. In the fictitious history of Catan, the environment of this set belongs to the 15th century. After Portuguese seafarers discovered the island in the Atlantic Ocean, a brisk cultural exchange between Catan and continental Europe begins. Both in the north and east of the island, a university is formed. However, the Portuguese seafarers not only bring new scientific knowledge to Catan; they also bring plagues.

Due to time constraints, this time I do not include a frame story similar to the one I used in the past two blog posts to introduce the cards of the “Era of Gold” and “Era of Turmoil” Theme Sets.

The University

The *University* takes center stage in this set. It can be found in the face-up draw stack. If you previously built an Abbey (Basic Set) or a *Library*, you may build the University directly, without having to draw it into your hand first.



The Library – a building that is required to build the University – costs only 4 resources, provides a victory point and, once you have built it, allows you to choose a card from one of the draw stacks. It is, therefore, an attractive alternative to the Abbey.



The University allows you to play a number of useful cards. For example, the two *Three-Field System* action cards provide you with additional grain income, and the two *Mineral Mining* cards increase your ore supplies.



You may use the two *Chief Cannoneers* to either take the strength advantage away from your opponent or to protect your own strength advantage.

The *Building Crane* is another advantage resulting from the University. If you have the Building Crane, each city expansion whose building costs exceed 4 resources costs you any one resource of your choice less. If you want to build the *Parliament*, the most expensive building of this set (it costs 7 resources), having the Building Crane would surely be an advantage to you. The Parliament is definitely worth it: its two victory points allow you to quickly catch up or even win the game.



The Plagues

The set includes a total of 5 event cards. Besides the two Invention cards already known from the Basic Set, the set contains three *Plague* cards. A Plague card causes each region adjacent to a city to lose one resource. That way, you can inflict considerable damage to a player who incautiously relies on city building.



There is an antidote, however: the *Bath House*. The regions of a city where a Bath House was built are protected from Plagues. So that more than one city can be protected from Plagues, 3 Bath Houses are available to the players. If things are already messed up, meaning that the Plague has already befallen one or more of your cities, a *Pharmacy* will console you a little for the resource loss. After a Plague is played, the Pharmacy provides its owner with any one resource of his choice – whether or not he was affected by the Plague.



If there is a Bath House, a *Doctor* isn't far away. Therefore, this set contains 2 of these action cards. In combination with a Bath House, the Doctor has the effect to increase the settlers' productivity, which manifests itself as an additional resource received in the two regions adjacent to a Bath House.

Other Cards

A set whose theme is progress shouldn't be without a *Town Hall*. The Town Hall gives you an advantage: when you exchange a card from your hand at the end of your turn, you may choose a card for free. You might wonder now if that makes the Parish Hall redundant. Yes, that's indeed the case. For this reason, the Town Hall is built directly on top of the Parish Hall and thus doesn't occupy a new building site.



Sometimes, a Town Hall is also a place for diplomacy. Therefore, it stands to reason that it serves as a requirement for playing the action Card *Guido the Ambassador*. Guido allows you to choose a card from the discard pile. This can be very helpful, for example, if you want to take advantage of the Three-Field System again. The action card *Gustav the Librarian* has the same effect. Needless to say that to play Gustav, you don't need a Town Hall. You need a Library. Both action cards may also be played without the building requirement if you have fewer victory points than your opponent.



Benjamin the Traveling Scholar may also be used without the building requirement. With the help of Benjamin, you once more receive the resource of each region whose number you rolled at the beginning of your turn.

In “The Era of Progress,” dealings between the players are more peaceful than in the “Era of Turmoil” set. The threat in the shape of Plagues comes from the outside, and you should try early enough to protect your principality via Bath Houses from resource loss. The University and the cards linked to it are not as strong as in the old Card Game any more, but they still are powerful enough to decide the outcome of a game.

The Duel

If you have played all three Theme Games and are familiar with the cards, the Duel mode will be a new challenge for you. In the Duel, all Theme Sets are used, although in a slimmed-down form. Many a reader of my blog post may have asked themselves what those funny little half moons on some cards mean. Well, if a card is marked with a moon, it “goes to sleep” during the Duel. That is, it is set aside. This means that we play the Duel with all the basic cards but only about half the cards of each Theme Set.

As a consequence, also the key cards only appear once: in the “Era of Gold” set there is only one Merchant Guild, in the “Era of Turmoil” set only one Hedge Tavern, and in the “Era of Progress” set only one University. You thus have to decide early on which strategic direction to pursue, or you must use tactics and change direction if your opponent has snatched a key building from under your nose. For example, if your opponent has the Merchant Guild in his hand or has even built it, you may try to counterattack with the Hedge Tavern or with the University and the cards linked to it.

The Duel mode offers a broad strategic and tactical spectrum whose appeal definitely compares to that of the Tournament mode of the old Card Game. However, the Duel mode’s great advantage over the Tournament mode is the fact that you don’t need a second game, because all required cards are included in the “Rivals for Catan” game box. And for all players who are not so fond of composing their own decks, the Duel

mode has the advantage of being able to start playing without spending much time on preparations and still having the full range of cards to choose from.

I'm not suggesting, though, that the Tournament mode is dead. It will be revived with the Expansion I, whose current working title is "Dark Times."

The German version of the "Rivals for Catan" game will probably be delivered to stores in Germany the same week this blog post is published. Completing the revised version of the old Card Game was a long journey, and Peter Gustav Bartschat, Dr. Reiner Dören, and Sebastian Rapp walked it together with me. It also was an exciting journey, filled with many test games and stimulating discussions that sometimes were profound and often also humorous and exhilarating. A beautiful experience, for which I would like to say a big thank you to the three of them. My special thanks go to Michael Menzel, who gave Catan its wonderful illustrations and thus justified the slogan "Catan comes to life."

In my next blog post – presumably by the end of this year – I will talk about the first of the three Theme Games of Expansion I, named "The Era of Intrigue."

PS:

The illustrator Michael Menzel used a photo of Peter Gustav Bartschat as a model for the "Gustav the Librarian" card. He also published two detective stories and is the author of the book "Im Zeichen des Sechsecks" ("Under the Sign of the Hexagon"), published in Germany on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of "The Settlers of Catan."

Photos of my two sons Guido and Benjamin served as models for "Guido the Ambassador" and "Benjamin the Traveling Scholar."

Klaus Teuber



CATAN